6: Tomasic E-4 (1947-1948) 1953 RF1 Great Russia RF1

[XII century]

and hence, no group support could be found if a leader had attempted to form a centralized political authority or an imperial system over the whole area. The old Russian Chronicle of Kiev (12th century) describing a tribe with such a culture (the Polians) states that among them each kindred group (*rod*) lived in its own separate locality and had its own government.[4]

In a like manner, principles of dignity and moderation, as well as personal autonomy and lack of coerciveness, prevailed in family relations of these people. The Chronicle, for instance, states:

> The Polians had customs of their fathers, customs mild and peaceful (*krotok i tikh*); they showed a kind of reserve (*stydenie*) towards their daughters-in-law (*snokha*) and their sisters, towards their mothers and their parents, towards their fathers-in-law and their brothers-in-law; to all of the persons named they showed great reserve. They had marriage cusoms: the bridegroom did not go to seek his bride; she was taken to him in the evening, and the following morning they brought what belonged to her (*chto vdaduche*).[5]

It appears that the family organization of the Polians rested on mutual respect of all family members; that the bride brought the dowry which remained her personal property; that she might have had the initiative in wooing. This contention is supported by other evidence. Cosmas Pragensis, for instance, speaking of the old Bohemian Slavs, states: "It is not the men who choose the maids, but the maids themselves who take the husbands they like, and when they like."[6] A French writer who visited Ukraine in the seventeenth century wrote: "In Ukraine, contrary to the customs of all other nations, the husbands do not choose their wives, but are themselves chosen by their future consorts."[7]

There is also other evidence concerning some matriarchal traits of the early Slavs.[8] Throughout ages, women of the plains betwen the Dnieper and the Volga maintained property rights over their dowries and also over income from vegetables, poultry, dairy products and yarn that they produced and sold, though such rights were not recognized to men.[9] Although a woman in Russia did not have any claim to the property of her father or her brother, and only a limited right to that of her husband, she had the privilege, denied to a man, of saving and building up a

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593 861 the people would say. Hence, made secure by the prevailing philosophy of life, upheld by court decisions and supported by Church teachings on the supernatural sanction of his will, the father might be tempted to take advantage of his unlimited power and to expose his son to excessively severe and humiliating treatment. "I had born you and I shall kill you," said Taras Bulba to his son and shot him to death.[15]

593 The father might also take advantage of his uncontrolled power in the use of family property and funds. He might gamble them away, spend them on debauchery, or bring the family to ruin as a result of drunkenness or mismanagement. Such incidents in Russian families are often described in autobiographies and other writings of Russian men of letters. It is characteristic of Great-Russian family relations that the other family members were not expected to complain against such extreme abuse of paternal authority.[16] Hence in all strata of Russian society, there was a tendency to accept anything the father did, even the most degrading treatment, as his paternal prerogative. Even if a father had ruined his family because of gambling or lechery he was still held in reverence both by his society and by his children.[17]

● 606 835 Occasionally, particularly among the peasants, the father might take sexual advantage of his daughters-in-law, a practice which became known as *snokhachestvo* (*snokha* is daughter-in-law). This habit, which was already noticed by the writer of the Kiev Chronicle, was favored by the frequent absenees of married sons who spent a part of the year in the city as workers or who were away from home for many years, or indefinitely, when conscripted for military duty. "The more women in the house, the more sin" (*Bolshe bab v semie, bolshe greha*),[18] the people would comment.

593 562 As much as the traditions of the steppe warriors prevailed in the Great-Russian patriarchal family the wife was placed on an equal footing with her children in relation to her husband. She had to show absolute submission and blind obedience to her husband. "The husband is father to his wife" (*Muzh zhene otets*);[19] "Christ is the head of the Church, the husband that of

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II

[582] Perhaps as a result of family centeredness and the need of keeping a distance from one's neighbor, there developed the practice of looking for the bride not in one's own but in another, more remote locality. Brides from afar, who did not have an opportunity to keep frequent contact with their own parents, were considered not only more amenable to control and easier to assimilate, but less dangerous from the point of view of the family's collective responsibility and isolation. "Do not buy a horse nor marry a daughter of your neighbor: both will run away"; "Get a wife from afar, buy a cow from near," the people would say.

[584] Very often there was nothing for a girl to look forward to in her new family. Her mate was not of her choice; he and his family were often complete strangers to her. She might not have even seen any of them before the day of her marriage. Wedding songs always refer to the bridegroom, his home, his father, and his village as "the abode of the strangers," "the unknown, far off land." As soon as the father had "stuck the hands" with the match-maker, the bride-to-be would start to lament and implore her father not to "give her away to the strangers." On the eve of the bride's marriage, her girl friends would come to her home and spend all evening singing *piesni plachevia*—"weeping songs,"[10] while the bride would cry and wail continuously. In these songs the future bride imagines herself as being left completely alone and without any affection in a distant, unknown and unfriendly world.[11]

[538] The anxieties and fears felt by the bride when going away to marry a stranger in a "strange land" might have found, perhaps, a symbolic expression in the *Zmey* tales. Zmey is a mythical being whose function is to deceive and rape young maidens and keep them forever in captivity. In the Great-Russian folk tales the Zmey is pictured as a terrifying "winged" and "many-headed" monster which throws fire from his nostrils and his mouth, but assumes the form of a youth of marvelous beauty before he abducts his victim.[12]

The prospect of the bride's relations with her husband's

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parents and brothers, and with her sisters-in-law was not any brighter. In folk sayings the father-in-law is often referred to as "worse than a dog," and the mother-in-law as a "wicked satan." Her expectations about the treatment on the part of other in-laws were not more cheerful, as witnessed by the folk songs.[13]

When married, she soon realized that "before the husband the wife is always guilty" (*Pered muzhem zhena vsegda vinovata*). And there was no one to whom to complain or from whom to seek comfort. Her own parents and brothers were "far away" or indifferent to her fate, now that she was "cut off from the loaf" and belonged to another family. And if she did not develop an attachment to her husband or to her children, she might have sought an escape from such a difficult emotional situation in extra-marital love affairs, or in fantasies about such affairs. The Great-Russian folk songs are abundant with such themes and often justify these liaisons as a need for love and attachment which was denied to the bride in the home of the husband.[14] Extreme husband-wife antagonism as expressed by murder is occasionally the theme of Great-Russian religious sagas and more frequently the theme of folk tales[15] and of folk songs:

Against my will was I married;
I have taken an evil wife,
An evil one, not to my liking,
Neither in feeling nor in thought.
Lovingly live with her—that will I not.
Across the stream will I go,
Love will I make to the girls.
As for that wife of mine
I will go pray for her death.
Along the bank of the stream
Death, the beautiful, goes.
"Ho there! My beautiful Death!
Turn thee back again, Death!
Make an end of my wife."
Scarce had I spoken—when Death
Began her work with my wife.
Scarce had I time to look around—
Shrouded in linen white was her corpse
Struck was the stroke on the bell.[16]

7: Lineva B-5 (no date)1893 RF1 Great Russia RF1

B. POSSIDELOTCHNY SONGS.

(SOCIAL GATHERING.)

5. THE BIRCHWOOD SPLINTER.

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(*Lootchina.*)

My dear birchwood splinter,
Why don't you burn brightly?
Or, may be, you have not been in the oven?
I have been in the oven all last night,
But the wicked mother-in-law crept into the oven,
She crept into it to put a pan of water,
And drenched me all over with water.

This is one of the possidelotchny or social gathering songs, which are used at the *possidelky*, as explained on page 17.[1] The subject refers to the unhappy condition of a newly married young woman, living with her husband's family, whom the mother-in-law does not like and annoys out of spite. The birchwood splinter was used formerly by the peasants for lighting the house at nights. [606] [373]

A long block of birchwood was carefully split into long pieces, like laths, which were dried in the big oven over night; when a light was necessary, such a splint was stuck into an iron fork, which stood on the floor, and the lower end ignited. This splint, even when perfectly dry, caused a great deal of trouble, as it had to be attended to frequently, to snuff it and to renew it. When wet, it was nearly useless, of course, and to work by it was nearly impossible.

In the next piece an allusion is made to the ends of the splints which had been left over from previous nights, and which the careful housekeepers required to be burnt when there was chance to do so, *i. e.*, when there was no company and not so much light was needed.

The simple and plaintive melody alone is sufficient to depict the deep grief caused by the tyranny of the family over a defenceless member of it

1 [See cat. 116 —— Analyst]

7: Lineva B-5 (no date)1893 RFl Great Russia RFl

7. I FEEL SLEEPY.

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(*Spitsia mne.*)

I feel sleepy and am dozing,
My head is dropping on the pillow;
My father-in-law is walking in the hall.
Angrily he is making a noise.
He knocks, he raps,
He knocks, he raps,
He does not let the daughter sleep.
"Get up, arise, you sleepy-head
"Get up, arise, you sleeper,
"You useless girl, you lazy one!"

My mother-in-law walks in the hall,
Angrily she goes up and down.
She knocks, she raps,
She knocks, she raps,
She does not let the daughter sleep.
"Get up, arise, you sleepy-head
"Get up, arise, you sleeper,
"You useless girl, you lazy one!"

I feel sleepy and am dozing,
My head is dropping on the pillow,
My dear husband walks in the hall.
Easily, softly he is saying:
"Sleep, dream, my dear,
"Sleep, dream, my own!
"You have been scolded and persecuted,
"You have been given away
"Too early in marriage!"

This is another example of songs which refer to the ill-treatment of a young wife by her husband's parents; only the love of her husband makes life at all bearable to her.

[606]